mplementing hardware

Peter Beresford

My phones were cut off. My secretary didn't get it together to pay them while I was carousing in Brasil over Christmas. Lovely and quiet. I seem to be becoming involved in teacher training, judging by the e-mail extravaganza that arrived when I finally got a line re-connected. Among the usual moans, gossip and irritating online gifts that take ages to download, a plethora of mails from teachers. (Is it PLETH-ora or pleth-ORA?) How do I sum up their letters in one pithy sentence?

"Just as a dyslexic agnostic insomniac tosses and turns, unable to decide if there really is a dog, do you lie awake wondering how to get good value from educational training suppliers? " How about that as a summary? Interested?

As producers of educational software, we don't have any trouble explaining our material; a Gap text program, a Worksheet generator, creative writing software and so on. Lovely stuff, although I say so myself. Ideal for computer-illiterate nitwits. The trouble is, by definition, teachers don't have any money. As they don't have any money, they don't buy anything, so there's no money in low-end educational software. So what happens? Teachers begin to use freeware. Loads of it about. Guaranteed to do a number on your extensions folder, horror stories abound. Anyway. Ambitious teachers who adopt using giveaway / freeware IT often migrate towards larger projects, which is when they get in touch with us. We make turn-key integrated linked hardware software solutions for every bla-bla puke sales rap ...I can never remember the text when people phone up.

A correspondence develops, with "an educationalist who wants to know how to implement lots of computers in networks and what software to use". It can easily develop almost into a draft project. Someone starts off wanting some giveaway samples and ends up corresponding on large-scale training project funding requests local authority information superhighway subsidy design pork barrel grant teacher training EEC lots of money projects ... Loads of that about, too. A decent little correspondence until the subject turns to money. Finance. Not the details, but the concepts.

ere are 5 questions I've trawled from the recent post from teachers:

1 What is the best way to implement hardware?
2 What's the best way to spend money on hardware?
3 How do you best spend money to get good value for educational consumers?
4 Laptops or desktops? Which gives better value?
5 Hidden costs; how do they figure?

Question 2 is the one I get asked most after workshops.
"What's the best way to spend money on hardware?"
Everyone has an educational hardware horror story. Everyone feels a little apprehensive with high budgets. Imagine this:

A person responsible for your work has given you the task of organizing and presenting a report on using computers to train or teach in some way. Internet bla-bla... Your task is to go away and research it. You are probably quite at home on an average PC.
Get a plan together, "using hardware in the classroom..." Someone you know designs a business plan offer outline draft proposal , making you aware of your own pitiful incompetence at handling modern information technology, but giving you the necessary benchmark from which to photocopy.

Fine so far. Everyone I correspond with could do or is doing that. Most of them, anyway. Then the online romance between the software producer and the teacher begins to fade. Gritty reality seeps into the messages as the teacher is forced to delve into the ghastly world of hardware financing. The kind of subject you 'didn't do' at school, knowing that you'd never in your life have to actually do it for real. Let's say you've got to work out which is best: a 12-month or a 2-year loan agreement on a bunch of laptops? Or a lease. You have to produce a conclusion that a complete twit can understand. You are that twit. What arguments will persuade your cheque-signer to pay the amounts you need, when you need them? Ooo-er. You're going to have to stand up in front of a group of people wearing very severe expressions and say things like "For a project involving 25 computers, hardware will end up being about 25% of the budget." Are you sure?

o cut a long story short, if you pay the hardware back within one year, your course budgets, 'what you can deliver', will be based on financial criteria. Put another way, if your priority is financial, then the sooner the hardware is paid for the better. However. If your first priority is to your consumers, your students, then a two-year repayment period is better. So the panel of severe expressions have a clear choice, but not enough

information to make that choice. This is what they need:

Question "What's the best way to spend money on hardware?"

Answer A two-year repayment period is the best all-round offer.

Why?
-the annual budget is 25% lower
-the % of resources spent on people is higher
-more is learnt by more students.

Does that answer the question? Can you work out why? Can you calculate those figures, or are there untold millions of "Financial nitwit incompetence" syndrome victims out there? Outsourced early-pensioned budget cut sufferers. Is an inadequate understanding of finance handicapping your horizons? Blocking your goals? Didn't you realise that whichever operating system you use is irrelevant.? Are you still mystified by the dyslexic agnostic insomniac? Is this a new training market niche? Enough questions and provocative thoughts. If you found more than three sentences in this article interesting, then go and have a look at:
http://www.dynamiclanguage.com/questionnaires
If you found it boring, then click onwards to the review section, where I believe this month there is a shattering exposé of corporate bloatware practices.
Peter Beresford
www.dynamiclanguage.com